Letters to the Editor

12/7/01

We Knew Japan Wa

As the author of "Day of Deceit," which Robert L. Bartley's Dec. 3 Thinking Things Over column—"September 11, December 7 and Limits of Intelligence"—takes issue with, I would like to make some clarifications. Mr. Bartley is quoting from "experts," who believe that the intercepted Japanese naval radio signals that organized the attack and named Pearl Harbor as the target were not decoded until 1945. The "experts" are quoting from 1950 documents. The U.S. Navy communications intelligence records I obtained in May 2000, pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, state otherwise.

Although these communication records were withheld from Congress and the American people for more than 50 years, and my discovery of them occurred after the hardcover edition (The Free Press/Simon & Schuster) of my book was published, I have reported on them in the updated paperback edition released earlier this year by Touchstone Books/Simon & Schuster.

Those documents include a communication dated Nov. 16, 1941 (Manila time), by the commanding officer of the U.S. Navy's secret monitor station on Corregidor Island, Lt. John M. Lietwiler, who notified his superior in Washington, D.C., that his radio cryptographers were "current" in intercepting, decoding and translating the Japanese naval code. One of his cryptographers was able to "walk right across" the Japanese messages, Lietwiler wrote. The Corregidor intercepts were available to the two Philippine commanders, Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Adm. Thomas Hart, but there is no record that they were sent to the Hawaiian commanders, Adm. Husband E. Kimmel and Lt. General Walter Short.

As I reported in "Day of Deceit"'s first edition, on the morning of Nov. 15, 1941, Gen. George C. Marshall, chief of staff of the U.S. Army, summoned the bureau chiefs of several news organizations to his office in the War Department. Pledging them to secrecy, Marshall disclosed that the United States had intercepted and decoded Japanese radio messages and that he expected the danger (war) with Japan to occur in the first week of December.

Harold, maybe you have heard of this book, Day of Deceit by Robert Stinnett 2001 (Paperback). He dedicates it to Congressman John Moss (D) (CA) author of Freedom of Information act— a truly important work on Dec. 7, 1941